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SIEBREN MIEDEMA*

PUBLIC, SOCIAL, AND INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION. VOICES FROM THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

ABSTRACT. Inspired by Charles Taylor's recent quest for the meaning of religion today, this article concentrates on the question of the meaning of religious education (RE) today. The focus is not so much on the 'what' but instead more on the 'where' (the locus) and the 'how' (the function) of RE. The view on what is held to be a pedagogically tenable position regarding RE is build up by methodologically using a differentiated practical–theological three-course model that distinguishes between the public, the social and the private domain. Developments and tendencies within the three domains are shown in respect with religion as such and RE in particular. It is made clear what this may mean for religious educators and philosophers of religious education today, who conceptualize religious education as an impossible possibility.

KEY WORDS: religious education, practical–theological three-course model, impossible possibility, Taylor, James

INTRODUCTION

What is the meaning of religion today? This is the question the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor raises in *Varieties of Religion Today. William James Revisited* (Taylor, 2002). Taylor is dealing with the shifts that have occurred during the 20th century in the relation between religion, society and the individual. His starting point is the classical work of William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (James, 1902). A book mostly interpreted as dealing exclusively with the perspective of the religiosity of the individual. Taylor is asking himself what the topicality of James's view is for us at the beginning of the 21st century.

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James's attention was nearly exclusively focused on the original experience of the individual, on the "feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (James, 1902, p. 31). Not religious institutions, traditions and creeds have religiously speaking motivating force for the individual person, but responses to prayers, conversations with the unseen, voices and visions, changes of the heart, deliverances from fear, inflowings of help, as well as assurances of support. Aptly summarizing James's view, Taylor states that the real locus of religion is in the individual experience and not in corporate life (Taylor, 2002, p. 7).

I will come back to the issue of the individualization of religiosity later, but now I want to outline why Taylor asserts that notwithstanding the topicality of James's view his analysis is insufficient and inadequate to be fully valid for the situation in which we find ourselves nowadays. Firstly, in James's analysis the collective and communal religious life is only dealt with as the derived, second-hand result of the original religious life of some highly gifted individuals, some *religious virtuosi* as Weber coined them. There is no possibility as it seems for "a collective connection through a common way of being" (Taylor, 2002, p. 24), for instance in the form of the church as a sacramental communion. Secondly, James plays off the individual aspect of religion too strong against, and at the detriment of the collective aspect. This is the reason that the relation between inner religious experience and social embeddedness is neglected. In James's approach the individual domain seems completely detached from the social and the public domain. With this view, James in a certain sense anticipated on what Taylor himself has characterized as the 'expressive individualism' that became manifest since the sixties in the second half of the 20th century. In this 'culture of authenticity' persons should try and find their own way in the domain of religion in stead of being submitted to a model that is imposed from outside by tradition, community or by religious and political authorities (Taylor, 1991, p. 25 ff).

Taylor does fully acknowledge the strong individualized nature of the spiritual way individuals are going today, but he is very doubtful whether this means that any relation with religious communities is completely missing. Besides, he has doubts about the view that says that in relation to religion there is no relation with the public and the political domain whatsoever in the factual life of individuals.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TODAY?

I will intensify Taylor's question about the meaning of religion today by concentrating on the question of the meaning of religious education today.

With 'religion' or 'world view' I mean "a more or less coherent and consistent whole of convictions and attitudes in respect with human life" (Dekker and Stoffels, 2001, p. 33). It regards a more or less systematical meaning giving or orientation in life. In a more limited and specified sub-classification I distinguish between religions or world views that deal with a God concept (for example Christian, Islamic, Buddhism), and others that do without a God concept (for instance Humanist, Atheist).

Related to a world view of a person different perspectives can be at stake: a perspective on life and death, on sense or meaningfulness and nonsense, on good and evil, on suffering, and on the ultimate aim of life. And the personal narrative of meaning giving and making is characterized by: (1) a certain sense of symbolic content; (2) commitment with or involvement on the person's own life; (3) the selection and use of sources of meaning giving; (4) the cultivation of profound meaning giving and existential experiences; (5) and a certain spin-off in other areas of the life of the person (Hijmans, 1997, p. 33).

In line with the limited and specified sub-classification mentioned above *religious education* is that part of identity or personal development of children and youngsters that focuses on the more or less systematic intentional as well as non-intentional religious meaning making processes, religious relationships and religious practices. Here different aspects come into play, being it cognitive, affective-emotional, volitional, as well as aspects dealing with action.

I will not focus so much on the '*what*' of the religious education but instead more on the '*where*' (the locus or place) and the '*how*' (the function of religious education now), and will combine these questions with what I think is a pedagogically tenable view on religion education.

To gain a clear insight in these issues, I use a differentiated practical-theological three-course model consisting of:

- *the public domain* of state and society (the macro level);
- *the social domain* of social associations, school, church, organizations, and clubs (the meso level);

- *the private domain* of family, individual and personal life (the micro level) (Heitink, 1999, p. 35 ff). I will concentrate on each of these domains. My core question run as follows: Which developments and tendencies do we observe now with an eye to religion and religious education, and what are the challenges these developments and tendencies create for religious educators and philosophers of education with a specific interest in religious education and both working in academia? I will mainly reflect on the situation I know best, and that is the one in the Netherlands. Of course I am curious to learn if and where my analysis connects to developments and tendencies that are experienced with a view on religion and religious education in other countries.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION WITHIN THE THREE DOMAINS

The Public Domain

At the start of the 21st century the Netherlands are transformed from a secular and de-pillarized society into a plural postmodern society. A society not only being multilingual, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic, but also and very prominent a society that has changed in religious appearance and has become multi-religious. This last change is one of the consequences of the strong migration that started already in the sixties of the last century. The Islam is one of the most striking and visible examples of this development.

Religion has been more persistent than was expected on the basis of the developments in the sixties and seventies of the 20th century. The basis on which religion and reason were for a long time diametrically opposed to each other, by characterizing the secularization as a victory of reason over religion, has been undermined in the postmodern society. A society in which the 'old religions' are characterized by a strong post-traditional tendency toward individualization, and the 'new religions' – for example the Islam – are still having all the identifying marks of traditionality, such as a strong connectedness to a community. New for the societal constellation in which we live now is that old and new religions are at the same time part of a plural and multi-religious society (Biesta et al., 2001).

The dramatic events on 11-09-2001 have also given a powerful impetus to the debate on the place of and the role for religion and religious education in the public domain in the Netherlands. One of

the leading spokesmen of the liberal party and also a university professor, Paul Cliteur, called on in an essay in a national newspaper to adhere publicly to the new gospel of ecumenical humanism, and to propagate this secularism actively with governmental support. Ecumenical humanism should for the western world but also for the rest of the world be the only cultural well to draw from, because no salvation is to be expected from the Abrahamitic religions. Cliteur's patron saint is Socrates, and in his footprints, according to Cliteur, morality should be liberated from religion and become autonomous. "The subsidy policy of the government should be focused on the propagation of secularism, should stimulate the separation of church and state, should foster respect for the classical human rights, and should especially be directed to the teaching of ethics. The main aim of this is to realize the separation between religion and morality" according to Cliteur. Religious activities should only find a place in the zone of tolerance, together with the use of alcohol and drugs. These are not just choices, but everyone is allowed to have a margin for own, free choices (Cliteur, 2001). In the several reactions on this provocative stance in general a different road was chosen. It was pointed to the fact that religions contain an overwhelming source of power. A source that shows itself also positively in individual responsibility, a strong concern for other people and concrete practices of solidarity. That source could also be used positively within the public domain. Especially to put a stop to potential but blame-worthy undercurrents in religions that aim for oppression and misery. It is worth to strive for a plural society with sufficient social cohesion, and dialogue between people from different religions, and besides teaching in ethics what is also needed is the teaching in religions.

In his New Year's Address 2002 the mayor of the city of Amsterdam, Job Cohen, called on not to underestimate the binding role of religion, and to give more attention to it in the public domain. He established his insight that "since a long time the government in this country does not pay attention to the role of religion: the separation of church and state is deservedly well thought-of with us. But the question is whether the government, though in compliance with the doctrine of that separation, should not be a better judge of the role of this religion, just because it does play such an important role as binding agent. If we want to keep the dialogue between each other going, then we also need to take into account the religious

infrastructure. Without mosques, temples, churches and synagogues we will not succeed" (Cohen, 2002).

The liberal-democratic minister of big cities and integration policy at that time, Roger van Boxtel, ventilated some months later a completely different opinion. Religion is a private matter. For that reason religion should totally disappear from the public and the social domain. "Religion, people need to settle that personally", according to Van Boxtel. As a consequence of this view religious schooling and education should be abolished. "Religion can be learned in your own spare time. Change article 23 of the constitution (in which the freedom of education is stated, S.M.) and be concerned about the fact that every child receives adequate state school education. In the Bible school or in the Koran school the teaching in religion can take place, if you like it. You are welcome to it, but it is time now for the disenchantment of school education" (Hesselink and Korevaar, 2002).

In spite of all the turmoil about Islamic schools at that moment, there were no adherents to this point of view. This formed no hindrance for this minister to continue on this road very forcefully in his current function as the new chairman of the Humanist Society on the pretexts of *Make your choice later but learn first* and *Do you also feel so specific in the public domain?* His repeated appeal on behalf of that society was everyday around the summer of 2003 to be heard as an advertising spot in the public domain on radio. It is remarkable in this context that in a flanking publication under the title *Special in the public domain. On the way to pluriformity in schooling* the government and school boards get the task apportioned to give form in state schools to religious or world view education in an active and plural way, a subject-matter that should be paid normally by the government. Reading that publication it becomes clear, however, that with religious or world view education, humanistic education is meant. In short, this publication is a plea for humanistic particularization of state schools and the general-denominational schools.

The recent public debates on the realization of religious lessons in Islamic and other denominational schools, have had among other things the effect that the minister of education has ordered the schools inspectorate not to evaluate the religious lessons of denominational schools structurally, but only if there are signs that children are put up to hatred, or in case that there are other things going wrong with these lessons. Interestingly enough the minister of education has recently also declared that she will prepare an amendment of the law that will

make it possible for the schools inspectorate to evaluate also the lessons in Christian religious education, Islamic religious education and humanist world view education that are given on a facultative basis *in* state schools and during school time, but which are not part of the responsibility of the state schools.

I do evaluate this last development very positively. It is my opinion that because it is a sign of the consciousness for their societal responsibility it should be normal practice if all schools notify publicly their view on and modeling of their religious curriculum. If view and modeling take place within the legal frameworks, the role for the schools inspectorate can be to supply the schools with an immanent and constructive criticism related to the school's vision, mission and practices. In my opinion this task for the inspectorate should not be restricted to catastrophes or calamities, but be made to a structural task for the schools inspectorate. Such an approach will of course require a change in attitude and operating styles for the school's inspectors. Within the bosom of the inspectorate preparations in this direction are in process.

It should be clear that these developments and tendencies leave the relative autonomous status of denominational schools untouched. It still challenges denominational schools to speak in plain about their small or broad school identity concept. So, they need to make clear how they want to position the religious dimension of their identity in theory as well as in practice. Such a strategy in respect with the task of the inspectorate may challenge the state schools to drop their very often kept forced neutrality, and to make clear what value loaded teaching and schooling in their view could mean.

If one wants to name this world view education, as it happens in the latest publications around the state schools and in circles related with the Humanist Society, then I can fully agree with that. With only one restriction to this, that is that world view education or edification should not exclusively be conceptualized cognitively, but that world view education next to cognitive aspects has always to do with affective-emotional, experiential, and action aspects too. With this addendum the distinction between religious and world view education and spiritual streams should become clear. Spiritual streams are since 1985 an obligatory subject-matter for all elementary schools in the Netherlands, but should according tot state regulations be objective, that is be purely cognitive. If this road away from the purely cognitive approach will be taken, this in my opinion will lead

to a further and desirable particularization of state schools. All schools special so to say (Miedema and Vroom, 2002).

The Social Domain

The next domain I want to deal with is the social domain. Related to this domain, my focus during the last ten years has especially been on the position of schools, more in particular of Christian schools. What has happened during the past decade and which tendencies do I sense with a view to the future of religious education?

It was only after the Second World War that it became usual to speak about the singularity of Christian schools in terms of their identity. Identity at that time only and exclusively meant the religious aspects and components of that school. Most favorite was the phrase 'the Christian identity of the school'. Only the religious aspects and components of the school were interpreted as determining the identity, that is in separation of the educational and the (pedagogical-) organisational aspects of the school. It was completely unusual to position the totality of the different dimensional aspects within an embracing pedagogical framework (Miedema, 1994; De Ruyter and Miedema, 1996).

Within the so-called open Christian schools due to the growing secularization and individualization in respect to religious life the religious and even world view diversity of the teaching staff was steadily growing. Dealing with the identity of the school was more and more interpreted as exclusively dealing with the religious foundation of the school, the core task of the headmasters and the board members of the school evaluating whether the teachers were still enough Christian committed school professionals. The growing diversity also had an impact on the headmasters themselves. Most of them also experienced changes in their own belief and committedness to the Christian especially church bound dogma's and practices. So, the change in their religious biography was one of the reasons that they hardly dare to pay attention to religious issues together with their staff. The net result was that working on the identity of the school – so, identity in a small sense – and working on and talking with their teams about religious matters in and around the school not infrequently became the big taboo topic (De Wolff et al., 2002; De Wolff et al., 2003).

Fortunately this situation has changed over the last 10 years. This change was also due to the fact that a lot of theoretical and empirical

research was focusing on the issue of school identity in relation with the professional and personal identity of the teachers and related to the identity formation processes of the students. Probably even more important was the fact that based on this research in service training for headmasters of elementary schools was given during the last decennium. Two year's programs in which the headmasters are challenged to reflect together with their school staff on the theory and practice of the identity of their school. They were challenged to answer the question whether they wanted to stick to a small identity concept or move in the direction of a broad identity concept, that is an identity concept in which three types of aspects (or three dimensions) namely the religious or world view aspects, the educational and the pedagogical-organizational aspects are related to each other in an integrative way and have the same reliability. A next question should be how they want to construct a road to go and reach that end. One of the important side-effects of this adopted approach is that it has opened the eyes for a multi-religious as well as an inter-religious filling-in of the religious or world view dimension in stead of just a mono-religious one.

De Wolff was some years ago pleading in the conclusion of her dissertation in which she dealt with the identity of Christian schools, for a suspension on the use of the term 'identity' (De Wolff, 2000). At this moment such a moratorium of the use of the notion 'identity' is much less unavoidable, also seen the developments that take place outside denominational schools. It is first of all remarkable that in circles of state schools, such as Teachers Colleges and societies for state school education, there is growing attention paid to the concept of the specific identity of the state school. Here we do not find a restriction only to the religious or world view dimension, but the whole school process is taken into account. For instance more than hundred elementary and secondary schools, united around the cultural-historical paradigm originating in the work of the developmental psychologist and pedagogue Lev Vygotsky, now deal explicitly deal with the topic of identity. Most teachers colleges explicitly pay attention to the relation of identity and teaching in their curriculum at the moment. In 2002 the Humanist University has appointed a professor who will explicitly deal with the issue of education from the perspective of the humanist world view. That colleague recently argued that the broad identity concept should inevitably come up for discussion in state schools and general-denominational schools as

well. In short, identity and school as a topic is right across the width on the schools' agenda (Veugelers, 2003).

The benefits of these developments are in my view that the identity of the school is interpreted in a dynamic, processing and constructivist way. To deal with the identity of a school is not the quest for the static, tied down, essentialist building blocks of the school – a kind of DNA-structure of the school – but the emphasis is on the dynamics in the school, on the developing processes and on the interaction between the diversity of the aspects and elements that can be distinguished analytically and that together and in relation to each other form the configuration that we wish to coin the 'identity' of the school. What precisely are the structuring principles, insights and agreements and in what way do they get shape in the interaction with students, between staff members and with partners outside the school? Is the relation between structure and action a matter of reflection, and does it happen in using a particular pedagogical framework? Why and in what way do changes and improvements get shape? In such processes the perspective on the identity of the school is integrative, integral and multi-dimensional, namely a combination of religious or world view aspects, of educational and of pedagogical–organizational aspects. It offers the confessional denominational schools the opportunity to free themselves from the cramp to narrow down every talk about identity to religious matters only. In other words: what should it mean for religious education if such schools-in-context hold the opinion that school identity is broader than just religious matters? State school and general-denominational schools on the other are on the other hand challenged to overcome their religious shortfall. If value free strict neutral education is impossible and an illusion, it is interesting to see in what way state schools are weaving the religious or world view aspects into their school's identity.

The Private Domain

In this third domain there are plenty of possibilities for religious education. However, it is my contention too that religious education is best be characterized here as an impossible possibility. Up till now I used the embracing concept of 'religious education' or 'world view education', but now I shall use one of the conceptions, being the religious education from within the Christian tradition.

Quite a lot has been said in the literature and in the media about the individualization of the present-day religiosity (Van Harskamp,

2000). One thing is extremely clear: the new religiosity has become far and foremost a religiosity of the individual. Such a process should not be interpreted or characterized merely as a loss, because it also bears in it the possibilities “for a recomposition of religion, inside as well as outside the context of the established religions (Janssen and Prins, 1998, p. 136). The current individualized religiosity does not lead by definition to egoism. This is due to the fact that the individual will also enter into relationships with others with whom this person feels connected in a certain sense and for particular reasons, being it permanently or, as it mostly happens, temporally. Such relationships may also have impact on the identity of the individual.

When traditional frames of reference like the pillars in the Netherlands that structured society in former days crumble away, and people identify themselves only partial with religious communities, so take part while making conditional promises, they factually construct their own course of life. They no longer do write a *religious standard biography*, but instead are constructing what is characterized now as a *religious choice biography* (see for the terms standard and choice biography Du Bois-Reymond et al., 1998). They are expected to justify the choices they have made in the past or the one they make now. Seen the multitude of possibilities, without the support of structured and structuring inspired and glowing associations, the fragmentation of the world, and the coercion to do anything meaningful with all the possibilities, this is indeed no sinecure.

The last decade an enormous amount of research has been done related on the question what precisely the role and function of religion and believe is in the life world of youngsters. Are they still busy with meaning giving and God? Youngsters are really just like the adults: their religiosity is mostly not institutional, that is church bound, but very concrete and related to the ups and downs of everyday, individual and expressing the desire for singularity. Youngsters are not oriented towards church membership, however, sometimes they go to church, but they very frequently pray. They very often experience the importance of God and believe in their daily life. Collective associations may provide in a need, but only if they are themselves allowed to decide which kind of linkage that may have, if there is a connection possible in terms of their language game, desires and views, and if there is the opportunity to meet each other in an informal and unconstrained way. It is very important for them if they are allowed to take part in the preparations, the organization and the

factual realization of activities, and to leave their marks on it. Collective gatherings with a high degree of massiveness are attractive because they also create the possibility to be unnoticed and hidden in the crowd. Youngsters are attracted by religious symbols and are eager to believe, but it should be possible to keep distance. Music is the cement of all their practices, because their specific taste distinguishes them from others. At the same time, however, partaking in or listening to music can reinforce the 'feeling of us'. The religiosity among youngsters can best be characterized as a pilgrimaging religiosity. In contrast with traditional believers these searching souls are striving for optimal freedom, they want to gain as much experiences and impressions as possible, and bind themselves only to short term commitments. The religious culture no longer is transmitted as a package of knowledge and skills, but seems to start anew with every youngster in a process of appropriation. In such a process the religious meanings at hand and religious meaningful aspects in the life world are transformed by the youngsters to personal meanings (Alma and Janssen, 2000; Roebben, 2003).

Religious communities that are attractive for youngsters and offer the opportunity to take part while making conditional promises, mostly combine a few of the above mentioned characteristics of the religiosity of youngsters. Such communities are above all characterized by both openness and a clear identity. This is the case with the Taizé Community, founded and led still, August 2005; by the old Brother Roger Schutz in the village of Taizé near Cluny in France. Each year thousands of young people from all over the world come to Taizé to join the Brothers in their action and contemplation. Everybody is welcome and one may come and leave as one likes. The community itself, however, has a clear identity, a firm and structured setting based on explicit rules band sustained in great unanimity and sincerity by the Brothers. This is what they offer and with it comes the invitation for young people to take part, to respond, to express them, to sing, discuss, pray and reflect. The Brothers, so we could say, create opportunities for encounter with no strings attached. Taizé offers hospitality, openness and inclusivity (Miedema, 2003). It offers and invitation for everyone to discover in every human being "the mystery of the hidden presence of God" (Schutz, 1967, p. 38), as the late Brother Roger Schutz has so aptly formulated it.

Inherent in the Taizé-approach is the aspect of partaking, as participation-on-their-own level and according to the person's own

needs and desires. It has also the impact of being swept along with the community of God seekers and Christ followers. This is fully in line with what I above coined as the appropriation view on religious identity formation and development, and it might also be very useful for schools. The core of this view is the religious identity formation that is concretized in religious practices which are presented in the school. Students can participate in these practices, and transform the content or subject-matter into their own property. Crucial are the choices the students are making on the basis of real insight, and based on participation in and experiencing the religious practices (Wardekker, 2002).

Important is also this aspect of the gaining of religious experiences. The Brothers of Taizé present and represent in my view in all clarity and with great hospitality an open arrangement where the youngster may enter at the moment she or he likes it. This entering offers the possibility to join and to participate, and this probably offers also the possibility to discover, to taste and to experience the mystery of the love of God. The heart of this love should not be flattened cognitively or be fixated dogmatically, but should be brought up cautiously and should be lived concretely. In taking part in such meaningful religious practices as the one in Taizé, the person's thinking, acting and experiencing join forces.

This sequence reminds us of what has been used in the first centuries of the church as a specific model of teaching, namely the *disciplina arcani* (Van den Berk, 1998). It starts with the experience of the mystery of faith, and during that time only keeping silent is suitable, before clarification follows or reflection is stimulated. Such a pedagogical approach can stimulate the development of religious sensitivity, the openness for the secrets of life, the experience of wholeness, the openness for the Total Different Other, for God, the Eternal, the Universe, and can make it possible to receive the gift of religion in the very process of religious education. On an analytical level religious practices can be distinguished from non-religious ones, but in real life they still may have relationships to each other (Wardekker, 2002).

Van den Berk, a Dutch religious educator, has indicated that this process of being silent about God should not be taken literally, but that it points to issues about which it is not possible to talk in a rational and transmission way. "It deals with truths and values that a person herself or himself should track down, which are dependent on a personal discovery, and which can only be endorsed personally.

These truths and values can never be proclaimed in a unifying way for everyone. (...) Every person itself ought to take position and such a position is not transferable. (...) At best the student can be inspired to take certain issues as truth. One can pose questions, can argue, but the most important thing, however, that is to make it truth for herself or himself is not transmissible” (Van den Berk, 1998, p. 33). What the pedagogue can do and for sure should do is to support and sustain the student to discover the religiosity in her or himself, to guide the students on their journey for their own, personal relationship with God. It is the responsibility of the pedagogues to supply the students with religious subject-matter in order to develop their own religiosity.

Precisely in this sense is religious education an impossible possibility. The personal relationship to God, and here I follow Jacques Derrida (Miedema and Biesta, 2004), lies beyond every *kataphatic*, that is purely positive or affirmative way of speaking about God, but it also lies beyond every merely *apophatic* or negative way of speaking about God. The religious quest always has a deconstructive preposition. The reason for this is that the name of God is not an essentialist entity – not an *esse* – but is standing for an arrival, a coming and for an event.

Should we thus literally be silent about God? It does not mean that we should not do anything at all – on the contrary. What we can and should do, is at least to try to avoid those situations which clearly block the incoming of the Other or God. One thing that is likely to impede this invention is if we would define the aim of religious education as the making or production of religious persons. Deconstruction reminds us that religious education is not a technology. It rather is about creating opportunities for children, students, learners to *respond*, to take a stance, positively or negatively, towards religious practices and rites, religious doctrines and narratives, religious traditions and religious visions.

We come into the world through our unique and singular responses – *not* as a result of what others tell us we should be. This further means that the aim of religious education should also not be to make our students into members of particular religious institutions or organizations, or to make them adherents of the religion of their parents and teachers. This is not only a problem because it would, again, try to determine the terms under which children, students, learners are “allowed” to come into the world. It is also a problem, because it would assume that we can know, for once and literally for

all what it is that religion is “about” and what it has to say to us. It would deny, in other words, the *otherness* of the Other, of God.

What should happen instead, first of all, is that children, students, learners are supported in making their own choices on the basis of a real understanding of and real participation in religious practices, rituals, and traditions. This may awaken a *religious sensitivity*, that is, an openness towards the secrets of life, an openness towards the otherness of the Other, an openness for the total Other. It is important to stress that participation in religious practices and traditions is only one way in which religious sensitivity may be awakened – but it is not necessarily or exclusively within what we would recognize as religious contexts and settings that religious sensitivity may emerge. This is not only because, educationally, we can never fully determine where and how this sensitivity may emerge. But it is also, theologically, because it is not for us to say when, where and how the Other, God, will disclose and manifest him/herself, when, where and how the Other or God will come into the world. This is why religious educators should develop their own sensitivity for the many, unpredictable and unprecedented ways in which their students may manifest their own emerging religious sensitivity, and may experience the impossible gift of religion by means of religious education (see *in extenso* about the issues touched on in this last part about Derrida and religious education Miedema and Biesta, 2004).

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